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July 17, 1892  
D. H. H. H.  
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## ON HUCKLEBERRY HILL

PICKING THE GREAT CROP IN POTTER  
COUNTY.

SCENES AT THE ANNUAL CAMP

The Pickers Come From Forty Miles to the  
Rock-Ribbed Mountain Between Phoenix  
Creek and Pine Creek—A Remarkable  
Spectacle of Pennsylvania Life.

Special Correspondence of THE TIMES.

ROULETTE, Pa., August 5.

When the first settlers came into this part of Pennsylvania, or into that division of it which is Potter county, they found bears, plenty, and panthers, and herds of deer and elk, but no huckleberries. There were endless forests of pine and hemlock, and of sugar maple, beech and oak, but no huckleberries. There were overtopping mountains and delightful sweeps of virgin valley, through which crystal streams coursed sweet and swift, but no huckleberries. To the pioneer families who came here from Northeastern Pennsylvania and New England, and the hills of New York State, where this toothsome wild fruit had grown in abundance, and who knew the importance of a huckleberry crop as a factor in the domestic economy where for many long months food supplies must come entirely from the products of the woods, the utter absence of this great bounty was not only a surprise but a bitter disappointment. But, knowing that in the huckleberry countries they had left the bushes bearing this fruit invariably came into existence where pine timber had been cleared away and the ground burned over, they lived in the assurance that they would see the familiar foliage springing from the soil after they had cleared their mountain land and put it to the fire. Such a result did follow down on the Sinnamahoning and other waters flowing into the Susquehanna, but nowhere on the watershed of the Allegheny river, embracing the greater part of Potter county, did the eagerly awaited huckleberry bushes push their heads above the soil the axe and brush fire had opened to the sun; nor, with the exception of an inconsiderable tract in the northwest corner of the county, have they ever appeared anywhere in the county where the head springs of the Allegheny drain the land. Why this should have been no one has as yet given any satis-

factory explanation. But the early settlers solaced themselves with the congratulation that if they had been bereft of huckleberries they were at the same time spared the annoyance and danger of rattlesnakes, accepting as true the apparent fact that wherever there are huckleberries there will rattlesnakes be found as well. There is not now, nor has there ever been, a rattlesnake along the Allegheny waters in Potter county, while over the dividing ridges, along the Susquehanna waters, that venomous reptile seems to find congenial and prolific homes.

It is now a quarter of a century since the last of the great pine forests of Potter county disappeared, and among the last of them to fall was the vast tract that lay between Pine creek on the south and southwest, the Genesee fork on the west and Phoenix creek on the east, in Pike township. This forest crowned the steep mountain that rises in that broad area, its summit being a table land many thousand acres in extent. The great canyons of Pine creek are on one side and the deep defiles of Phoenix creek on the other. This mountain has an elevation of 1,500 feet above tide. When these primitive pines had gone the way of all their giant fellows in the region, a second growth of pines grew rapidly in their places, but of an entirely different variety. They were known as jack pines, and were so full of pitch that they were cut and converted into tar, hundreds of tar kilns being erected on the summit, the ruins of many of which are to-day found among the brakes and rocks. With the disappearance of the jack pines this mountain became a treeless barren, a deserted waste, a prey for brush fires that no one cared to control. Then the discovery was made, after one of these early spring fires had swept over the pine barren, that huckleberry bushes had come up through the black ashes the fire had left on the stony soil—the low bushes of the genuine, rich-pulped, full-flavored early blue huckleberry; thousands upon thousands of acres of them, growing as thickly as timothy stalks in a meadow. This would have been a matter for no surprise in the adjoining counties of Clinton and Cameron. The surprising thing in those counties would have been, in fact, the non-appearance of huckleberry bushes on the burned pine barrens. But in Potter county, where the berries had persistently refused to grow before, this sudden appearance of the bushes on the great pine barren of the Pine creek waters was as surprising as if oil had been struck on the isolated summit after the drill had failed to find it elsewhere in the country.

The crop of berries that ripened on those original bushes was enormous, and in no season since then has the huckleberry crop on the great hill failed. The rock-ribbed mountain soon received the name of Huckleberry Hill, and as such it is known to-day, standing unique in its isolation as the only spot between the far-off waters of the Sinnamahoning on the south and the great spread of Steuben county hills on the north, and between the Susquehanna watershed on the southwest and the Chemung Valley on the east, where the huckleberry grows and ripens as it does in all the surrounding country outside those boundary lines. So for years, from the time the berry season opens, which is about the middle of July, until it closes



about a month later, and in spite of the rattlesnakes, which are big and ugly; in spite of the sun, which blazes on the treeless summit all day long, and in spite of long and tedious journeys that are necessary to reach the spot, this lofty, flat-topped ridge has been the daily Mecca of hundreds of men, women and children, drawn thither by the magnetic huckleberry, to pick which a journey of thirty or forty miles over rough and hilly roads seems to be looked upon as rather a recreation than a toil.

The annual pilgrimage to this furnace-like hilltop is now at its height for this season. The berry crop was never larger, and every day thus far the barren has been one great, busy, frolicking, boisterous, sweating camp, in which there have been at no time less than 800 people of all sorts and sizes, while on Sundays the gathering is increased to more than 1,000. The scores of tents that whiten the sunburned barren liken the scene to some great gathering of gypsies, or to a big military encampment. A large portion of the campers is made up of family and social groups, who remain two or three days on the ground picking berries for their own domestic uses, and the rest are professional pickers, picking for market, and living on the barren until the season is over. These pickers frequently consist of entire families, from the gray-haired grandfather down to the toddler just big enough to pick, and alert enough to keep an eye out for rattlesnakes. Tents are struck by the dozen every day by parties breaking camp, but other campers are constantly arriving to take their places, and thus while the scene is always changing it still remains the same from the beginning to the end of the season.

There is but one way by which the summit of Huckleberry Hill can be reached with teams, and that is by the old road the lumbermen cut in the side of the hill years ago to get the pine logs down to the Pine Creek Valley. This road is a mile in length, in which distance it climbs to an elevation of eight hundred feet. On one side the steep escarpment of the mountain pitches down to the valley with but a foot or two between it and the outer edge of the road. The other side is the crowding front of the mountain that lifts itself above the road. This thoroughfare is so narrow that it is impossible for teams to pass one another, and as conveyances of all kinds are constantly arriving from every direction, laden with berry-pickers and their boxes, barrels, baskets and pails, and seeking passage from the valley up the great hill; and as other conveyances that have come before and secured their loads of berries are just as constantly seeking passage down the hill to the valley, not much progress could be made by either going or returning caravans if it were not for a peculiar law of right of way which has been established. During a certain hour teams going up the hill have the right of way, and teams headed for home must wait until that hour is up before they start down. A man at the bottom regulates the upward train of wagons, while a man at the top of the hill holds the downward teams in check. When the hour is up, no wagon is permitted to start up the hill, no matter how many may be waiting at the bottom. The ensuing

hour belongs to the downcoming teams—and so they go and come every other hour. As many as thirty teams have been loaded up the hill in an hour. Some of these come from the farthest boundaries of the county and from far over the New York State border, many traveling all through the night to reach the spot in good season. During the recent insufferably hot days, when most people were melting in the coolest places they could find, hundreds of men, women and children were eagerly hastening to the summit of Huckleberry Hill to pick berries in the full glare of the broiling sun and among close-growing bushes that glow like a furnace.

On Sundays this great huckleberry camp becomes a veritable Vanity Fair in the wilderness. Then hundreds of people go to Huckleberry Hill as they would to a circus or a county fair, or other gathering where curious things are to be seen. The fakir, with his wares; the wheel-of-fortune man and the shell game sharper; the rustic swain and his sweetheart, with her inevitable white Sunday dress and red and green ribbons; the smart town fellow with his smarter girl; the brawny log chopper, boisterous and rough; the swaggering bark-peeler, not only ready for, but looking for a fight—the town, the farm, the back woods—flock to the huckleberry barren of Pine creek on Sunday. Here is a dancing platform with a blaring band. Yonder a tent as big as a circus tent, where can be obtained what no other place in Potter county may supply—whisky, gin, beer or what tittle you may name—for Potter is a prohibition county, and not even a single glass of beer has been legally sold within its boundaries for more than thirty years. But Huckleberry Hill is a law unto itself. It keeps and sells its spirituous wares ostensibly as antidotes for snake bites, but a careful man, viewing the effects of the liquor on nearly all who test it, might well prefer the rattlesnake poison to the venom of the tittle. But to the sounds of music and the shouts of dancers, and the noisy and perpetual clink and clatter of glasses and the not infrequent yells of drunken bushwhackers in free and promiscuous rough-and-tumble, the berry-pickers keep busy at their work in the blazing, scorching rays of the sun, the heat intensified and cast back in the faces of the sweating toilers by the dry, stony soil, the gleaming fronds of a million brakes and the glistening foliage of acres of heat-reflecting bushes. It is doubtful if anywhere else in this broad land may be found another such camp as this.

As the visitor draws near the spot where he is to turn off of the main road to take the narrow and precipitous wagon path for the summit of Huckleberry Hill, he can't help but notice in passing the occasional farm houses what appears to be seen from a distance pieces of rope dangling from the limbs of apple and other trees in the fields by the roadside. The frequency of these apparent lengths of rope may presently excite his curiosity, but it will not be, perhaps, until he comes face to face with one on a branch that hangs near the road or on a fence stake that he will discover that these supposed dangling ropes are snakes, and not only snakes, but rattlesnakes. But they are dead ones. They have been killed in the potato fields and orchards and pasture lots and hung up



as trophies. These are indubitable evidences that the visitor has left the Allegheny watershed, is among the upper reach of Susquehanna waters and nearing Huckleberry Hill. If he chanced to be one of the 1,000 persons who went to the great pine barren a week ago last Sunday he undoubtedly saw the fourteen nice specimens of rattlesnakes the man at the foot of the hill had lying on the ground around him and heard him say that he had killed them all that day.

Whether or not it is true, as a rule, that wherever you find huckleberries you will find rattlesnakes, it is certain that it is true of this great rocky barren in Potter county. A four and a half foot rattlesnake is larger than the average of its kind, according to natural history, but such a rattlesnake is not a big one on Huckleberry Hill. A man who amused many of the big crowd on the barren the second Sunday of the present season and frightened others by using a rattlesnake, its head clenched in one hand, as a whip for his horses, which snake was five feet long and had ten rattles, had also a rattlesnake's skin eight feet long and another one six, both of which snakes were killed within ten feet of a huckleberry picker's tent. This man sold the eight-foot skin for \$5. Another interesting individual moved about among the crowds with eight dead rattlesnakes twisted around his arms, offering them for sale at a dollar apiece, using as an inducement for men to purchase them the cheerful assurance that every one of these snakes had been killed on the grounds that day. Another man peddled the rattles of other deceased snakes, some of them being sixteen segments in length and all taken from the genuine Huckleberry Hill rattlers. A man was coming up the mountain road on horseback the other day, when his horse suddenly shied and came near hurling himself and rider down the mountain side. The man dismounted and took his horse by the head. Then he saw that the horse had been frightened by a rattlesnake that lay in the road, stretched at full length and reaching from one side of the road to the other. The snake was quickly killed. It lacked an inch of being six feet long and had twelve rattles.

Many times a day from among the huckleberry pickers, especially the female portion, a loud, shrill shriek of terror will arise, and a picker, white-faced and with frightened eyes, will be seen flying away from the spot where he or she had been picking. Every one within hearing knows what that cry means and from a dozen mouths the anxious query comes:

"Are you hit?"

The answer is usually, "No; but there's one there!"

Then some one gets a club and goes over "there" and smashes that "one's" head, and the picking is resumed as if nothing had occurred to interrupt it. Only one picker has been reported bitten by a rattlesnake on Huckleberry Hill this season—a woman, name unknown, who was hurried down to Galton, four miles away, to a doctor's. Her home was twenty miles away, and as she was taken thither, it is not known on the hill whether the bite was fatal or not.

Between 6,000 and 7,000 bushels of huckleberries will be picked on this lone, wild, barren plantation this season. Those who pick

them to sell get ten cents a quart for all they can supply, without taking them off the grounds. One man and his wife have picked and sold 100 quarts every day thus far this season.

Ed Mott.

From, *Journal*  
*Coudersport Pa*  
Date, *Dec 1. 1897*

### HISTORY OF COUDERSPORT.

(Read by Mrs. John R. Groves.)

It was perhaps quite natural that the committee who planned this reminiscence meeting of the Presbyterian church of Coudersport should desire also that some one take a backward glance at our town, for the organization and growth of the Church have been so associated with that of the village that the history of either is incomplete without the other. Let me say, first, that my chief informer and authority in preparing this sketch was Mrs. Mary A. Ross, and if any interest attaches to the material here presented, or credit for its preservation, it is largely due to the excellent memory and remarkable descriptive powers of this venerable woman who was a member of the first family that settled in Coudersport, and who still lives in our midst in fair health and in full possession of all her mental powers.

Potter county was organized in 1804, out of a part of Lycoming county, to which county it remained attached for judicial purposes many years after. The name "Potter" was given in honor of James Potter who had "come into the Susquehanna country" as land agent and surveyor before the Revolutionary war. He served under Washington or La Fayette in that war. The name of the township, "Eulalia," was in honor of a daughter of John Keating, the principal owner of lands in all this region. To perfect the organization of the county, a county seat must be chosen, surveyed and legally maintained. The present site was selected and the survey made in



1807-8, by Surveyor John King. By a deed executed June 3, 1808, John Keating conveyed two-thirds of the lots then surveyed in Coudersport, two public squares, one for a Court House and one for an academy, together with 150 acres adjoining the town site, to the county. He also gave \$500 for the erection of a school building, and asked that the name he had given the place, in honor of a friend, John Couder, should be retained.

But the Court House square remained a forest until 1822, and no building, except a temporary shanty, put up probably by some hunting or fishing party, was reared here until the autumn of 1824, when John L. Cartee, the step-father of Mrs. Ross, then Miss Mary Knight, then a girl of 14 years, came here from Tioga county, N. Y., and with the help of two men he had brought with him, attempted to build a house on the site of the present county jail; he was only able to raise the frame of his house before cold weather came on, but he had prudently leased the Court House square and some other lots the commissioners had cleared a couple of years before, and sowed them to wheat, and returned to New York State.

In May of the following year, 1825, he returned with his wife, the step-daughter, little son and two hired men. Mrs. Ross says that in the one sunny spot in the almost unbroken hemlock forest, she planted some garden seeds, the next day after their arrival. Boards were set up tent fashion, to shelter the family and their belongings till a roof and siding could be gotten on to the frame put up the fall before.

A road, called the State Road, had been cut from Wellsboro to Smethport years before, but it was only barely passable for teams. Lymanville was already quite settled, Mr. Isaac Lyman and Mr. Cephas Nelson having been there a number of years, and the former having at this time a saw mill and a good dwelling house. Mrs. Ross makes vigorous protest against the recent changes that have been made in some of our local names. To think of "Lymanville" being dropped for the name of "Ladonna," a name with no significance and no connection with the history or the people. "No one will ever hear me call it that," she declares.)

Besides the Lymans and Nelsons,

the Cartee family had neighbors on the west, where Julius Colcord now lives, Mr. John Pect having come there from New Jersey in 1811, and on the north Mr. Daniel Clark, grandfather of Mrs. Snyder, had settled in 1807. Mrs. Ross remembered that the few lots cleared were fenced with *charred logs*, where now are our fine buildings and beautiful lawns.

Mr. Cartee built fire-places in his house, but for baking he built a rough stone oven in the present street between the jail and the "Coudersport Hotel." There was a little grist mill at the mouth of Dingman Run, where the Hammond tannery now is. But most of the provisions and necessities of life had to be brought from Jersey Shore or Olean. A postman, with the "fast mail," made the trip once in two weeks. Letter postage was 25 cents. Mr. Cartee paid \$16 for the whole jail and Stebbins square.

During 1825 came also Timothy Ives, grandfather of Watson Dike, who built a house and the first store in Coudersport in 1826. In 1827 a Mr. Hinkle, a blacksmith, settled here. His son, Samuel Hinkle, was the first child born in Coudersport, and Mrs. Hinkle's death, the ensuing winter, was the first death.

About this time also came the Dickinsons, the Strongs, Dennis Hall's family, the McDougalls, and in 1839, Mr. John S. Mann, followed later by others of his family. But a few years later the Jones, Olmsted and Hamiltons had been added to a growing community.

The first Court House had been built in 1835, the Commissioners' office having preceded this by some years. The first public school building was the one on the corner of West and Fourth streets, now a dwelling house, though several schools had been taught prior to its erection; one in the Commissioners' office by the clerk, one Dea. Reed, another on the site of M. S. Thompson's drug store, and very soon after this, Mrs. Mary Kent, who had come here from Delaware county, N. Y., taught both a select school and the district school for 18 months. The academy, to found which Mr. Keating had given money and land, as above stated, and for which the State Legislature had afterward appropriated \$2,000, was opened in September, 1840, a Professor Maxson, of



Allegany county, N. Y., being the first teacher. It is worthy of note, just here, that at the time the academy rose on the west hillside, stately and white against its dark evergreen background, this primitive settlement in the heart of a hemlock forest, had less than a dozen dwellings in it; thus, almost before the barest necessities of life had been secured, this people were moving for a high school in their midst. It was another manifestation of the same spirit which prompted the Legislature of "Massachusetts Bay Colony" to appropriate money for founding Harvard College only *six years after Boston itself* was settled. Appreciation and desire for knowledge has remained a Coudersport characteristic.

One serious natural obstacle to the building up of the town existed in the swamp which covered one-half of the valley. Mrs. Ross says she and Mrs. Ives often gathered cowslips—"marsh marigolds," on the site of the Crowell House, and that the swamp was impassable from Owen Metzger's to the Larrabee place, except on fallen tree trunks. As late as the building of the house now occupied by Judge Olmsted's family, the cellar having been laid in the fall and left open during the winter, filled with water and made an excellent skating park for the few young people who could afford the luxury of skates.

Miss Mary Knight had been married in 1827 to Capt. David Ross, who had come to Coudersport in that year as land agent and surveyor for the Bingham's. Her daughter, whom we know as Mrs. Mary R. Jones, was the first female child born in Coudersport. Mrs. Ross says that her first cooking stove was brought from Dansville or Rochester in 1840, and was a marvel in the community. She says one of the inconveniences, not to call it a hardship, of her early days was that the best butter they could get was invariably *flavored with leeks* which grew so rankly in the woods where the cows must feed; but a friend counseled the family to place a *leek* by each plate on the table, take a bite with their other food and they would not notice the flavor of the butter; the prescription was followed with satisfactory results.

The fundamental principal of homeopathy recognized early here, you see. I think the family of John

Peet were probably not troubled with leek-flavored butter, for Mr. Peet wrote of one of their early years in Coudersport: "The few seeds that I was able to plant the first year yielded but little produce; we, however, made out to live, without suffering, till the next spring at planting time, when I planted all the seed that I had left, and when I had finished planting we had nothing to eat but leeks, cow-cabbage and milk." This was all for six weeks. But to return to the early "forties."

With the establishment of schools, a postoffice, two churches and the Court House, Coudersport at once seems to touch our own times, and our interest in what was primitive and heroic wanes. From this time, its growth was somewhat slow, but normal. During the decade prior to the War, excitement over the slavery question ran very high; the strain of Quaker blood that had been added, manifesting itself in bitter opposition to the "southern institution," and as a strong impulse to patriotism and support of the war when the great crisis came.

Another agitation culminated about the same time, in 1860, in the passage of a special Act of Legislature prohibiting the sale of liquor in Potter county. The securing of this law was largely due to the efforts of the late Hon. John S. Mann.

No account of Coudersport, however brief, could omit the great fire of May 18, 1880, when the heart of the village—almost the entire business portion, was consumed within the space of three hours. All the dailies of the Associated Press contained next morning big head-lines,

"Coudersport in Ashes," and indeed the *old* Coudersport was largely a thing of the past; but a new town has risen from its ashes,—more robust and aggressive in all its activities. There is one fact I like particularly to emphasize in closing this cursory sketch of Coudersport, that *one* of the two women who first settled in the town, still lives,—that she has known and taken keen interest in all the growth and improvement of the place,—has watched its development step by step, from the time she cooked and sat by her rude stone fire place and read by her pine-knot torch, till now, still an independent housekeeper, she is able to place a burning match in her modern and artistic stoves, and an invisible

and intangible fuel from the bowels of the earth springs to her service; the still more wonderful current of electricity has conquered the darkness of the once lonesome forest, and from her doorway she watches the steam locomotive and railroad train gliding over the impassable *swamp* of her girlhood days.

















